

IN THE CLAIMS:

Please amend the claims as follows:

1. (amended) An aspirating system for caps of sample containers, comprising a suction duct (1), a partial-vacuum space constituting a collecting container (2), and a blower (5) generating a partial vacuum in the collecting container (2) during its operation, wherein the collecting container comprises a closing device (4) at its lower side.

2. (amended) The system as claimed in claim 1, wherein the closing device (4) is a flap.

3. (amended) The system as claimed in claim 1, wherein the closing device (4) constitutes at least one segment (7) of a base wall of the collecting container (2).

4. (amended) The system as claimed in claim 1, wherein the closing device (4) is fitted with a substantially horizontal pivot shaft (11) and a counter-weight (13) is mounted opposite the base wall (7), and wherein the closing device (4), when the collecting container (2) is empty, will be closed or nearly so even in the absence of a partial vacuum.

5. (amended) The system as claimed in claim 1, wherein the closing device (4), during operation, is loaded with caps of sample containers and is kept closed by the partial vacuum, and wherein, in the event of absence of partial vacuum, the closing device (4) shall pivot by means of the weight of one or more caps into an open position.

6. (amended) The system as claimed in claim 1, wherein the closing device (4), when in an open position constitutes a chute (7, 9) onto which the caps by their own weight shall drop from the closing device (4).

7. (amended) The system as claimed in claim 1, wherein the blower (5) is a centrifugal blower.

8. (amended) The system as claimed in claim 1, wherein a filter (3) is mounted between the collecting container (2) and the blower (5) and wherein said filter exhibits a pore size to achieve a separation rate of about 95 % for particles with a size of 0.2  $\mu\text{m}$ .

9. (amended) The system as claimed in claim 8, wherein the filter (3) is a filter cartridge disposed at a suction side of the blower (5).

10. (amended) A method for operating a suction system for test vials, said system comprising a suction duct (1), a partial-vacuum space constituting a collecting container (2), and a blower (5) generating a partial vacuum in the collecting container (2) during its operation, said collecting container comprises a closing device (4) at its lower side, the method comprising the steps of:

starting the blower (5) to produce a partial vacuum in the collecting container (2);

aspirating a number of caps and collecting the caps in the collecting container (2);

shutting off the blower (5) to empty the collecting container (2); and,

pivoting the closing device (4) under the weight of the caps into its open position, the caps dropping from the closing device (4), which thereupon is pivoted by a counterweight (13) at least almost into its closed position.

11. (amended) The method as claimed in claim 10, wherein, following emptying of the collecting container, the blower (5) is again turned on and the closing device (4) is forced by the partial vacuum into its closed position.

12. (amended) The system according to claim 1, wherein in that the system is part of an automated opening apparatus for human or animal fluid samples.